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SUBJECT: CHILD LABOR REMAINS AN ISSUE IN MALAWI

REF: STATE 148987

SUMMARY

¶1. One-third of Malawian children aged five to seventeen are involved in child labor, according to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training's recently released Malawi Child Labour 2002 Report. The report, funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) through the International Labour Organization (IOL), demonstrates that: 72 percent of children attend school; 84 percent of children are employed; and of those employed, 47 percent are employed under the survey's definition of child labor. Also included in the report are Street Children and Child Prostitution studies, which focus on the socio-economic factors involved in the children's situation. Without quantifying the number of street children or child prostitutes, both surveys found that a majority of street kids and children in sex trade had lost one or both parents. END SUMMARY

Child Population of Malawi

¶2. The Malawi Child Labor Survey (MCLS) was carried out through a representative sample of 8,000 households. From these interviews, it was determined that there are approximately 3.8 million children in Malawi between the ages five and seventeen and that these children account for 34 percent of Malawi's total population. Although 2.7 million children (72 percent) reported being enrolled in school, the survey estimated that 3.2 million children (84 percent) were working either in their homes or outside of their homes in both economic and non-economic activities during the twelve months preceding the survey.

Child Labor

¶3. The MCLS defines child labour as: "Working children below the age of 14 years who worked for more than seven hours in the reference week and working children between the ages of five and seventeen, were categorized as child labour if they were working in agriculture." Using this definition, the survey found that around 1.4 million children in Malawi are employed in child labor, representing 37 percent of the total five to seventeen child population.

Children in Economic and Non-Economic Activities

¶4. Out of the 3.2 million working children, the survey found 1.5 million to be working in economic activities. The MCLS defines economic activity as working for pay, either in-cash or in-kind, or engagement in family activities without pay, such as farming or hunting. An additional 1.7 million children (53 percent of working children) were working in only housekeeping capacities. The MCLS defines non-economic activity as activities of a domestic nature and also voluntary and charitable activities.

Street Kids Survey

¶5. The Street Kids Survey was conducted in 2003 and used a sample population of 396 street children. Of the street children interviewed, 93 percent were male, and 51 percent had at least one deceased parent. The survey found that around 56 percent of street children's mothers were unemployed, but were capable of working. Fewer than four percent reported their mothers to be employed.

¶6. The survey also found approximately four percent of street children had worked, or been looking for work, in the week prior to being surveyed.

Child Prostitutes Survey

¶7. The Children in Commercial Sexual Exploitation Survey (CSECS) was conducted in 2003 with a sample of 549 children involved in sex work. Of the children surveyed, approximately 85 percent were between the ages of fifteen and seventeen and approximately 87 percent had been in the sex trade for less than two years.

18. 49 percent of the children surveyed had lost both parents, and approximately 60 percent had lost a mother. Around 24 percent of the children in commercial sex work also had a mother who was unemployed, but capable of working. Fewer than nine percent of the children had employed mothers.

19. The survey also found that nine percent of children in commercial sex work were attending school. Of the children surveyed who were not attending school, 72 percent had dropped out, while 18 percent had never attended school.

Background

10. Child labor in Malawi came to the attention of the international community in 2000, when a report on Tobacco Tenants in Malawi acknowledged widespread child labor practices. The MCLS was conducted to provide quantitative data on children's activities (economic and non-economic) to determine the nature, magnitude, and reasons for child labor and the subsequent effect of such labor on a child's education, health, and moral development. USDOL provided financial support for this survey through the ILO.

COMMENT

11. While there are deficiencies with the statistical analysis of this report, it does provide a more quantitative look at the issue. Recognizing the continuing problem of child labor in various sectors, post welcomes Malawi's inclusion in the Department of Labor's International Child Labor Program Education Initiative (reftel).

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